

Emi-Beth Quantson
Guest Speaker, University of Ghana, College of Education
Speech

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Education,
Members of Convocation,
Staff and Students,
Alumni,
Graduands,
Invited Guests,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Class of 2019 congratulations. You made it!!! I would like for you to take a moment and just scream because you've done it!!!!

Many said if you didn't pass BECE you wouldn't amount to anything and then it was SSCE or WASSCE as it is now and here you are graduating from the prestigious University of Ghana, College of Education. Congratulations!

To put this in context, according to World Bank data on education in Ghana as at 2016, graduates from tertiary education were reported at 90,942 (both sexes). With the total of the female population fifteen and

older with tertiary schooling being 1.53%.¹ So you Class of 2019, have joined the ranks of the elite and already have all you need to succeed.

It hasn't been an easy journey for many of you. As distance learners in particular who must have been juggling many responsibilities including fulltime jobs, starting families, pursuing your own business and being there for family and friends, your determination has already taught you how to make the best of circumstances while striving for what you want. You have also already experienced first hand the cost of data and the impact of CST. Your determination has been key in getting this degree.

For the women graduands in particular I give you an extra hearty congratulations for managing your school work with all the unpaid housework you do and the multitasking that almost seems ingrained.

Once you've burnt the midnight oil to submit an assignment, or leveraged the intellect of your friends to find the right answers, while persuading your support system to give you more money, you already know the tricks of survival in the next phase. Determination is an understatement in your case.

I graduated in, what in my mind was not too long ago, in 2007. I know how it feels like to sit in your seat, excited but also afraid of the next chapter. Unsure of what will happen after this celebration: will I land a good job? Will I be able to turn all my dreams into reality? And what if it

¹ <https://tradingeconomics.com/ghana/graduates-from-tertiary-education-both-sexes-number-wb-data.html>

all fails? I was even more worried about failing, as I was familiar with this phenomenon. I graduated with honors instead of the higher honors, which I planned to obtain. I wish I could say that all those questions will fade and that you will find all the answers. You will find some but most of the time you figure it out on the go. And the fear, even 12 years after graduation, I can tell you, that the fear never goes away. Once you get a job you have a fear of losing it, or not making enough money or not being promoted or not being satisfied in your job. Although I also don't have all the answers, I can assure you that the journey itself is the satisfaction and you can draw confidence from your successes.

Life is not a smooth ride for anybody regardless of who you are and how many resources you have. There will always be curveballs and unlike in class where there is a right answer that your professor has up his sleeve, there are no guaranteed right answers. One right decision may still lead you to a bad outcome and a bad decision may still lead to a good outcome. There are no straight answers to the questions which life offers. However, there are experiences that we can all learn from and as I share my story I hope this would be one of them.

When I was asked to give the congregation speech I was pleasantly surprised, how did I get to this point to be recognized by the prestigious University of Ghana as someone worthy to speak to this graduating class that has already experienced so much. To show you how my journey shaped me, I will share three stories from my life with you.

The first story is about small beginnings. While I was in university like you, I had a dream of starting a coffee shop. I had a Kenyan friend, who lived in Ghana, who I had long talks with about coffee being cool, bringing people together. The smell of coffee alone made my heart skip a beat so why not start a café myself I thought? Well first of all, I couldn't afford a coffee machine and didn't even know where to get one locally. Second I had no idea where to get coffee or how to make it and third, my target market had no money.

My dream of a coffee café turned into a student café, isn't that failure? You could see it as failure if you take out the value which the experience taught me. Suddenly I had to figure out how to hire and train staff, how to put in procedures for production and accounting and how to design and build out the space I identified on the lawn of my university campus. And these are just to name a few examples. It wasn't what I had dreamed but just by trying I learnt so much, I learnt how to pitch my idea to reluctant students who would become my cofounders. I learnt that when others see you striving they can identify ways they can help. An example was my architecture lecturer, Mr. Evans-Anfom who brought my vision to life on paper, for free. By doing I also learnt that my staff brought unique perspectives that drove the vision. So while my small beginning might not have worked out the way I wanted, I honour this experience for what it taught me. Things may not work out as planned but don't get stuck on the plan and miss out on the fun and experience. Honour your small beginnings, as they can be the start of something greater in your life.

The second story shows the value of having faith and making the jump. I quit my very well paying job to become an entrepreneur. Sounds pretty crazy right? Why give up your comfort and security? Making this change forced me to reflect on how we actually measure success. What do you consider a successful life? Have you thought about it? There is a skew in our society where your self worth comes from your title or the organization that you are associated with and this prestige takes precedence over everything. It takes precedence over whether you are happy, whether you get to spend time with your family, whether you are healthy, or if there is anything you would rather even do. And of course, how much money you make is more important than how you make that money. So, after landing my first job which was a dream job, it was a bit radical, 6 years later to take the risk to step into entrepreneurship. It was incredibly scary and all the fears I felt when I sat at my graduation resurfaced. Had I just messed up my life? Would I ever recover? Two things helped me to move beyond fear. one I went skydiving. I jumped out of a plane. There is something about flying in the air with no anchorage that makes you believe you can do anything easily. Second, I made the mistake of socialising with entrepreneurs who encouraged me to take the bold step. Yet still I hesitated. How did I hack this? I began softly, I transitioned into consulting (self employment), working almost 5 jobs at a time to maintain my lifestyle. Even though technically I was a “consultant” in each case, the truth was I had 5 full time jobs with flexible work hours. While doing this I attended coffee industry conferences and took classes to get up to speed in my coffee knowledge and prepare to launch my big entrance into entrepreneurship. By stroke of luck and opportunity from my consulting ventures, I found my first location for my

coffee shop and began. Here I learnt that you can learn anything. My training was in accounting and business. My passion turned out to be coffee. Through continuous education online and beyond I learnt new skills and adapted to new challenges. So have a little faith, prepare and learn what you need to to evolve.

The third story relates to our purpose. In transitioning from my well paying day job there was always a drive to do more and have more impact. It wasn't enough to make money or provide services that saved others money. Who was I impacting and what difference did I make? This drive has formed the foundation for Kawa Moka and our growth. We have created value through a product that is processed locally and is enjoyed locally. Kawa Moka has grown into a fullscale coffee manufactory, obtaining our green coffee beans directly from women farmers in Leklebi in the Volta Region of Ghana and roasting at our well equipped industrial roastery. Moving from small beginnings, we made the jump and grew into manufacturers and who knows, perhaps one day we will take our place in history with the giants like Nestle and Unilver. I never would have known what we were capable of had we not tried. I never would have known what I was capable of if I hadn't asked myself if I was happy with the impact I was making and where I was. I understood where I was coming from and leveraged that. Let your experience leverage your future, dig deeper and grow from every learning moment. Each one of you has a story to tell. Each one of you will always have a story to tell. Whats your story today? What'll be you story in five years? In ten? Your hard work, your attitude and your resilience will decide what your story is. May your stories always be inspiring and fulfilling.

So today on your day of graduation, a day when you celebrate a milestone achievement I challenge you to build the businesses you wish could exist. Only YOU bring them into existence. Change the work culture. Explore life outside your comfort zone. Get to know yourself. The journey won't be easy but you just might be invited to speak to a group of intelligent, enthusiastic young graduates and impact their lives. And how cool would that be? And do not forget, you're already there. You're a graduate. So believe in yourself, honour your small beginnings, don't be afraid to make the jump and never stop evolving to fulfil your purpose.